2009

The Effect of Emotional State on Inadvertent Plagiarism Memory Errors

Amanda C. Gingerich
Butler University, mgingeri@butler.edu

The Effect of Emotional State on Inadvertent Plagiarism Memory Errors

Amanda C. G. Hege

Butler University

Abstract

We investigated inadvertent plagiarism by inducing participants into a happy or sad mood before they generated items in a puzzle task. Compared to happy mood, participants induced into a sad mood made fewer memory errors in which they claimed a previously-generated idea to be new; confidence ratings in these errors, however, was higher.

Background

Mood and Memory

Negative mood has been shown to increase the accuracy of memory.[1] The *affect-as-information hypothesis*[2] maintains that individuals' moods provide them with information about how to interpret a given situation. Individuals in happy moods are more likely to rely on general knowledge structures that have been activated and to process information more globally whereas individuals in sad moods are more likely to focus on information specific to the situation at-hand. The item-specific focus of individuals in sad moods is thought to result in more accurate memory than that of individuals in happy moods.

Inadvertent Plagiarism

Inadvertent plagiarism represents a memory error that occurs when one claims as new an idea generated previously.[3] In this way, it is a failure to accurately discriminate old items from new items.[4, 5]

References

[1] Storbeck, J., & Clore, G. L. (2005). With sadness comes accuracy, with happiness, false memory: Mood and the false memory effect. *Psychological Science, 16*, 785-791.

[2] Gasper, K., & Clore, G.L. (2002). Attending to the big picture: Mood and global versus local processing of visual information. *Psychological Science, 13*, 34–40.

[3] Brown, A. S., & Murphy, D. R. (1989). Cryptomnesia: Delineating inadvertent plagiarism. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, & Cognition, 15*, 432-442.

[4] Landau, J. D., & Marsh, R. L. (1997). Monitoring source in an unconscious plagiarism paradigm. *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review, 4*, 265-270.

[5] Macrae, C. N., Bodenhausen, G. V., & Calvini, G. (1999). Contexts of cryptomnesia: May the source be with you. *Social Cognition, 17*, 273-297.

[6] Marsh, R. L., & Bower, G.H. (1993). Eliciting cryptomnesia: Unconscious plagiarism in a puzzle task. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, & Cognition, 19*, 673-688.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Cari Day, Amanda Miller, and Michael Patrizio for their assistance with data collection and analysis and to Jonathan Emmons for his invaluable programming skills.

Method

Participants:

40 University of Virginia undergraduate students (20 Happy Mood and 20 Sad Mood)

Sample Puzzle

Procedure:

Participants took turns with a computer player generating solutions to six Boggle-type puzzles[6] in the Initial Generation (IG) phase. Then, in the Generate-New task, participants were instructed to generate new solutions to each puzzle that were presented neither by themselves nor by the computer player during Initial Generation. Participants were induced into a happy or sad mood by writing about a happy or sad personal event for 10 minutes before Initial Generation.

Response Types in Generate-New Task

Correct: An item that neither the computer nor the participant submitted during IG and that the participant claimed was new.

Partner-Plagiarism: An item that the computer submitted during IG but that the participant claimed was new.

Self-Plagiarism: An item that the participant submitted during IG but that he claimed was new.

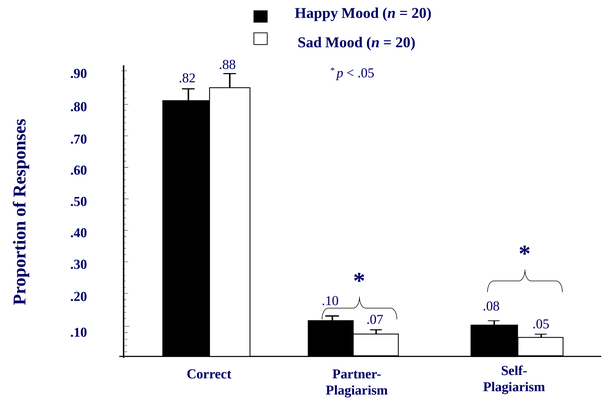
Prediction

The *affect-as-information hypothesis* predicts that sad mood results in more local, item-specific processing than does happy mood, which should lead to fewer inadvertent plagiarism errors for participants induced into sad mood. Therefore, partner-plagiarism errors in the Generate-New task were expected to be lower for participants in the sad mood group than for those in the happy mood group.

Results

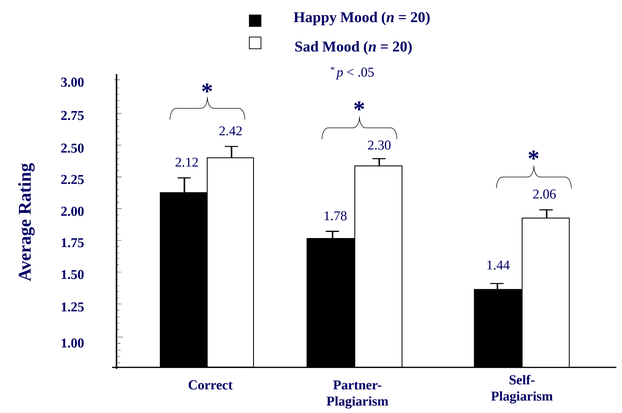
As predicted by the *affect-as-information hypothesis*, compared to those in a happy mood, those in a sad mood showed a lower proportion of partner-plagiarism and self-plagiarism errors.

Accuracy



Compared to those in a happy mood, those in a sad mood tended to be more confident in both their correct responses and in their inadvertent plagiarism errors.

Confidence



Conclusions

Participants induced into a happy mood mistakenly claimed items to be new when, in fact, they were originally generated by the computer partner (partner-plagiarism errors) or by themselves (self-plagiarism errors) more so than did those induced into a sad mood. This suggests that item-specific processing accompanies a sad mood, resulting in fewer memory errors and an inflated sense of memory accuracy.